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THE
NATURE,
DESIGN,
AND
GENERAL RULES
OF THE
METHODIST SOCIETIES.

ESTABLISHED

By the Rev. JOHN WESLEY.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED,

THE RULES
OF THE
BAND SOCIETIES.

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THE  
NATURAL  
HISTORY  
AND  
GENERAL PRINCIPLES  
OF THE

METHOD OF



THE

BRITISH MUSEUM

LONDON

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PAUL CHAMBERLAIN

## RULES of the SOCIETY.

1. **I**N the latter end of the Year 1739, eight or ten Persons came to Mr. Wesley, in London, who appeared to be deeply convinced of sin, and earnestly groaning for Redemption. They desired (as did two or three more the next day) that he would spend some time with them in prayer, and advise them how to flee from the wrath to come, which they saw continually hanging over their heads. That they might have more time for this great work, he appointed a day when they might all come together; which from thenceforward they did every week; viz. on Thursday in the evening. To these, and as many more as desired to join with them, (for their number increased daily) he gave those advices from time to time which he judged most needful for them: and they always concluded the meeting with prayer, suited to their several necessities.

2. This was the rise of the METHODIST SOCIETY, first in London, and then in other places. Such a Society is no other than "A company of persons, who, having the Form, are seeking the Power of GODLINESS: United, in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their Salvation." \*

There is only one condition previously required of those who request to be admitted into this Society, namely, *A desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins,*† But wherever this is fixed in the soul, it will be shewn by its fruits.‡

\* "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." Gal. vi. 2. Heb. x. 24. Acts ii. 42.

† Matt. i. 21. ‡ Matt. iii. 8.

That it may the more easily be discerned, whether the members of the society are working out their Salvation, each society is divided into smaller companies, called Classes, according to their respective places of abode, or as it may suit their convenience. There are about twelve persons, or more, in each class; one of whom is stiled the Leader.

No person is admitted upon trial, till he has met three or four times in a class, and is recommended by a leader, or by a proper person, and receives a note from a travelling-preacher, and the rules of the society. Having met two months on trial, and being recommended by the leader, he then receives a Ticket, and is considered as a member of the society.

Persons are received into society in large towns, on the Sunday following the quarterly visitation of the classes. The officiating preacher then reads over their names in the society meeting.

A Leader ought to be a person of *clear experience, and sound judgment, truly devoted to God, zealous for the salvation of souls, of upright conversation, and one who has gifts proper for the work.* He is nominated by the superintendent, at a leader's meeting, and if approved of by a majority of the leaders present, is confirmed in that office.

It is the business of a leader to see all the persons belonging to his class *once* a week at least, in order to enquire how their souls prosper. Not only how they keep the Rules of the Society, but how they grow in the knowledge and love of God. To advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort, as occasion may require. To receive what they are willing to give for the support of the Gospel. To meet the Preacher and Stewards of the Society once a week, in order to inform the Preacher of any that are sick; or of any that walk disorderly, and will not be reprov'd. To pay to the Stewards what they have received of  
their



their several classes, and to shew their account of what each person has contributed.

A Steward of the Society ought to be *an experienced christian, of upright conversation, and one who can write and keep fair accounts.* He is chosen to his office at a quarterly, or at a leader's-meeting. He is then nominated by the superintendent, and if approved of by a majority of the persons present, confirmed in his office for *one year.* And at the end of the year, is either re-elected, or another person chosen into his place. But no leader or steward can be put out of his place, but by a majority of leaders, or a quarterly-meeting. Neither can any member of the society be excluded but by a majority at a leader's-meeting.

All the members of the society must continue to evidence their desire of Salvation, By doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind, especially that which is most generally practised. Such as the taking the Name of GOD in vain. The profaning the Day of the LORD, either by doing ordinary work thereon, or by buying or selling; by employing a barber; by making or going to any feast or wake; or by learning the military exercise as a volunteer, or by attending to see them exercise on the Lord's-day.

They must avoid drunkenness; buying or selling spirituous liquors, or drinking them, unless in cases of extreme necessity. Fighting, quarrelling, brawling; brother going to law with brother; returning evil for evil, or railing for railing.\* The using many words in buying and selling: The buying or selling uncustomed goods. The giving or taking things on usury, that is, unlawful interest.† Uncharitable or unprofitable conversation; all foolish talking and jesting.‡ Evil speaking, particularly of magistrates and ministers, seeing that in the oracles of GOD we are commanded to be subject to the

\* 1 Pet. iii. 9. † Psa. xv. 5. ‡ Eph. iv. 29.

higher powers ; and that *Honour the King*, is there connected with the *Fear of God*.\*

Doing to others as we would not they should do unto us. Doing what we know is not for the *Glory of God* ; as the putting on of gold or costly apparel ; the following the vain and foolish customs or fashions of the world : †

The taking such diversions as cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus ; such as *Dancing, Cards, Plays, Balls, or Horse-races*. None of which can be reconciled to the advice of the Apostle. ‡

The singing those songs or reading those books, which do not tend to the knowledge and love of *GOD*. §

Softness and needless self-indulgence ; Laying up treasures upon earth : Borrowing money without a probability of paying it again ; or taking up goods without a probability of paying for them. ¶

It is expected of all who continue in the society, that they should continue to evidence their desire of Salvation, By doing good ; by being in every kind merciful after their power, as they have opportunity ; doing good of every possible sort, and as far as possible to all men. To their bodies, of the ability which *GOD* giveth, by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping those that are sick or in prison.\*\*

\* 1 Pet. ii. 17. † “ Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds,” Rom. xii. 2. and 1 Cor. x. 31.

‡ “ Redeem the time, because the days are evil.” Eph. v. 16.

§ Eph. v. 19. and James v. 13:

¶ “ The wicked borroweth and payeth not again.” Psa. xxxvii. 21.

\*\* “ To do good and communicate, forget not, for with such sacrifices *GOD* is well pleased,” Heb. xiii. 16. Matt. xxv. 35, &c.

To their souls, by instructing, reproving, or exhorting all we have any intercourse with. ||

By doing good, especially to them that are of the household of Faith, or earnestly desiring so to be; employing them preferably to others.\* Buying one of another, helping each other in business; and so much the more, because the world will love its own, and them only.† By all possible diligence, frugality, and cleanliness, that the Gospel be not blamed.‡

By running with patience the race that is set before them: Denying themselves, and taking up their cross daily; submitting to bear the reproach of Christ; to be as the filth and off-scouring of the world; and looking that men will say all manner of evil of them falsely for the Lord's sake. §

It is expected of all who desire to continue in the Society, that they should continue to evidence their desire of Salvation, By attending all the ordinances of God. || The ministry of the word, where it is preached or expounded in its primitive purity, at all opportunities; carefully, with earnest prayer to God for a blessing upon what they hear. ¶

The Supper of the LORD whenever it is administered, with solemn prayer, and deliberate self-devotion.\*\*

|| "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart; thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him," Levit. xix. 17.

[\* Especially barbers who do not follow their business on the Lord's-day.]

† Rom. x. 12. Heb. xiii. 1.

‡ 2 Cor. vi. 3. 1 Cor. x. 23.

§ "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you, falsely, for my sake," Matt. v. 11. Heb. 11. 2.

|| Psa. xxiv. 4.

¶ "Blessed are they that hear the word of the Lord and keep it," Luke xi. 28.

\*\* "Do this in remembrance of me." Luke xxii. 19. Cor. xi. 26.

Family prayer, morning and evening at the least.\*

Private prayer also, morning and evening, and oftener if opportunity serve.†

Searching the Scriptures; by reading some part of them every day, carefully, seriously, and with earnest prayer for a blessing from GOD; and doing this fruitfully, immediately practising what they learn.‡

Fasting or abstinence, especially on the four quarterly fasts, (viz.) The first Friday after New-year's-day, after Lady-day, after Midsummer-day, and after Michaelmas-day.§

No member of the Society shall marry with an unbeliever, or a person who does not fear GOD and walk in his ways. Neither should they take any step towards marriage but in the fear of GOD, with earnest prayer for direction, and with the advice and approbation of their christian friends.¶

To prevent impostors from defrauding our brethren; and likewise to introduce the real members into all the privileges and fellowship to which they have a just claim, when obliged to remove into other parts, they are enjoined to receive a Note of Recommendation from a Travelling-preacher before their removal.

\* "Pour out thy fury upon the heathen that have not known thee, and upon the families that call not on thy name." Jer. x. 25. and Psa. lxxix. 6.

† "Enter into thy closet and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father who is in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret, will reward thee openly." Matt. vi. 6.

‡ "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think that ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me." John v. 39. Col. iii. 16.

§ Matt. vi. 16.

¶ "Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers." 2 Cor. vi. 14.

§ "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he will direct thy paths." Prov. iii. 6. Heb. xiii. 4.

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The Superintendent or some Travelling-preacher, shall, if possible, meet the Local-preachers once a quarter; and no one can be admitted as a local-preacher, unless he is proposed and approved of by a majority of that meeting. If this cannot be done in any particular circuit, then they must be proposed and approved of at the quarterly-meeting.

Every local-preacher must meet in class, and conform to all our discipline; and none can be excluded in this respect.

In order to preserve the life and power of Godliness among us, the members of the society are desired, carefully to guard against formality in public worship. In singing the praises of God, all the congregation are requested to join, [the women are desired to sing their part,] to take care not to sing too slow, to use no vain repetitions, and to sing no anthems. The hearers are intreated, seriously and solemnly to join with the preacher in prayer, and to hear the word with the deepest attention; taking care not to talk in the chapel when the service is over; but to go quietly and silently away, so that they may profit by what they have heard.

In order to preserve our Rules, all the members of the society should constantly shew their Tickets to the steward, or to those persons who may be appointed for that purpose, at the meeting of the society.

No person can continue a member of the society who becomes a bankrupt, unless it appears, upon examination, that he has acted uprightly, kept good accounts, and has not been concerned in the base practice of raising money by coining notes, commonly called the *Bill Trade*.

No person who is a trustee, shall be excluded from the society, until his crime or breach of the Rules be proved, in the presence of the rest of the trustees and leaders.

No person among us shall call another Heretic, Bigot, or any other disrespectful name, on any account, for a difference in sentiment. No

No school-master or mistress, shall teach dancing, or receive a dancing-master into their school; nor should the members of our society suffer their children to be taught to dance.

These are the General Rules of our Societies; all which we are taught of GOD to observe, even in his written Word, the only Rule and the sufficient Rule both of our Faith and Practice. And all these we know his Spirit writes on every truly awakened heart. If there be any among us who observe them not, who habitually break any of them, let it be made known unto them who watch over that soul, as they that must give an account. We will admonish him of the error of his ways: We will bear with him for a season. But then if he repent not, he hath no more place among us. We have delivered our own souls.

## R U L E S

### *Of the BAND SOCIETIES,*

Drawn up December 25, 1738.

**T**HE design of our meeting is to obey that command of GOD, "*Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed,*" Jam. v. 16.

The following questions ought to be proposed to every person that desires to be admitted into the Bands.

1. Do you enjoy the knowledge of Salvation by the remission of sins? (Luke i. 77.) And have you the peace of GOD in your conscience? (Rom. v. 1.)

2. Have you the love of GOD shed abroad in your heart? (Rom. v. 5.)

3. Have you the Spirit of GOD bearing witness with your spirit, that you are a child of GOD? (Rom. viii. 16.)

4. Has

4. Has no sin, inward or outward, dominion over you? (Rom. vi. 14.)

5. Do you desire to be told of all your faults, and that plainly?

6. Do you desire that each of us should tell you whatever we think or fear or hear concerning you?

7. Do you desire, that in doing this, we should come as close as possible; that we should search your heart to the bottom?

8. Do you desire, that each of us should tell you from time to time, whatsoever is in his mind concerning you?

9. Is it your desire and design, to be on this and all other occasions, entirely open, so as to speak every thing that is in your heart, without exception, without disguise, and without reserve?

Our design is,

1. To meet once a week, at the least.

2. To come punctually at the hour appointed, without some extraordinary reason.

3. To begin exactly at the hour, with singing or prayer.

4. To speak each of us in order, freely and plainly, the true state of our souls, with the faults we have committed in thought, word, or deed, and the temptations we have been exercised with since our last meeting.

5. To end each meeting with prayer, suited to the state of each person present.

6. To desire some person among us to speak his own experience first; and then to ask the rest in order, as many and as searching questions as may be, concerning their state, sins, and temptations. Such as

1. Have you been guilty of any known sin since our last meeting?

2. What temptations have you met with?

3. How was you delivered?

4. What have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it be a sin or not?

DIREC.

## DIRECTIONS given to the BAND SOCIETIES.

**Y**OU are supposed to have the "Faith that overcometh the world:" To you therefore it is not grievous,

I. Carefully to abstain from doing evil: in particular,

1. Neither to buy or sell any thing on the Lord's-day.

2. To taste no spirituous-liquors, unless prescribed by a physician.

3. To be at a word both in buying and selling.

4. Not to mention the fault of any behind his back, and to stop those short that do.

5. To wear no needless ornaments, such as rings, ear-rings, necklaces, laces, or ruffles.

6. To use no needless self-indulgence, such as taking snuff, or tobacco, unless prescribed by a physician.

II. Zealously to maintain good works: in particular,

1. To give alms of such things as you possess, according to your power.

2. To reprove all that sin in your sight, and that in love, and meekness of wisdom.

3. To be patterns of diligence and frugality, of self-denial, and taking up the cross daily.

III. Constantly to attend on all the ordinances of God: in particular,

1. To be at public worship, and at the Lord's-table every week, if possible; and at every public meeting of the Bands.

2. To use private prayer every day: and family prayer, if you are the head of a family.

3. To read the scriptures, and meditate therein, at every vacant hour. And,

4. To use fasting or abstinence, as often as your health will permit.

F I N I S

